

Committee on Finance and the Northampton City Council

*Councilor David A. Murphy, Chair
Councilor Jesse M. Adams
Councilor Maureen T. Carney
Councilor Marianne L. LaBarge*

**City Council Chambers, 212 Main Street
Wallace J. Puchalski Municipal Building
Northampton, MA**

Meeting Date: May 5, 2016

Meeting Minutes

- 1. Meeting Called To Order:** At 7:30 p.m. Councilor Murphy called the meeting to order.
- 2. Roll Call:** Committee members present were: Councilors Murphy, Adams, Carney and LaBarge. Also present from the City Council were Councilors Dwight, Bidwell, O'Donnell, Sciarra, and Klein.
- 3. Approve Minutes Of The April 26, 2016 Meeting:** Councilor Carney moved to approve the minutes; councilor LaBarge seconded the motion. The motion was approved on a voice vote of 4 Yes, 0 No.
- 4. Financial Orders:**

A. 16.060 Financial Order Regarding Budgetary Transfers Between Various Department

Councilor LaBarge moved to return the order back to the full City Council with a positive recommendation; Councilor Carney seconded the motion. The motion was approved on a voice vote of 4 Yes, 0 No.

Councilor LaBarge asked about the funds specified for City Council travel; Finance Director Susan Wright indicated that the funds were for City Councilors to travel to the MMA Conference in January.

B. 16.063 Financial Order To Authorize Payment Of A Prior Fiscal Year Bill For Smith Vocational & Agricultural School In The Amount Of \$8,135.36

Councilor LaBarge moved to return the order back to the full City Council with a positive recommendation; Councilor Carney seconded the motion. The motion was approved on a voice vote of 4 Yes, 0 No.

C. 16.065 An Order To Surplus Property And Authorize The Mayor To Transfer The Property To The USA For Inclusion In The Conte Fish & Wildlife Refuge

Councilor Carney moved to return the order back to the full City Council with a positive recommendation; Councilor LaBarge seconded the motion. The motion was approved on a voice vote of 4 Yes, 0 No.

Planning and Sustainability Director Wayne Feiden was present to talk to the City Council about this order. The former Golash farm was divided up when the interstate was build. There were only two tiny parcels left and the owner stopped paying taxes on the leftover property years ago. Regarding the portion of land on the north side of the interstate, the City Council has already approved a deed in lieu of foreclosure. On the south side, the City Council has already approved a transfer to Fish and Wildlife. The north side was put in with a DPW parcel, however, the DPW doesn't want the land. The Conte Fish

and Wildlife Refuge is willing to take the land. Also in the same vicinity of this land is a piece of land that once held a ferry terminal. A portion of the land was made surplus by the City Council about a year ago. The plan is for this portion of land to be turned over to the Conte Fish and Wildlife Refuge as well.

Councilor Dwight asked about the DPW's restricted use of the land; Director Feiden indicated that it is on the other side of the dyke and not much use to the DPW. The City will no longer be responsible for maintaining this land.

D. 16.066 Order To Purchase Land Off Of Reservoir Road

Councilor LaBarge moved to return the order back to the full City Council with a positive recommendation; Councilor Carney seconded the motion. The motion was approved on a voice vote of 4 Yes, 0 No.

Councilor Bidwell asked when a conservation restriction would be pursued. Director Feiden explained that if the City wants the land to include public access and recreation or management rights, then the City will move toward owning the land. A conservation restriction will be sought whenever there is "working" land involved; the City doesn't, for example, want to own farm land or land that is actively managed for forestry or other needs.

E. 16.067 Order Authorizing The Mayor To Waive & Decline The City's Right Of First Refusal On Property Located On Rocky Hill Road

Councilor LaBarge moved to return the order back to the full City Council with a positive recommendation; Councilor Carney seconded the motion. The motion was approved on a voice vote of 4 Yes, 0 No.

Director Feiden explained that the land does not connect to any conservation land currently owned by the City. The land is best to be used for a house as some of the land is developable.

Mayor Narkewicz explained that the right of first refusal means that the City would be required to pay the owner the selling price.

F. 16.068 Order To Purchase 55 +/- Acres Located Between Glendale & Westhampton Roads

Councilor Carney moved to return the order back to the full City Council with a positive recommendation; Councilor LaBarge seconded the motion. The motion was approved on a voice vote of 4 Yes, 0 No.

Director Feiden explained that the City will not be using the borrowing authority; however, having the authorization does make the City much more competitive for grant applications. If the grant is received, the borrowing authority will be rescinded. This was previously an approved subdivision with a plan to put 24 homes in the subdivision. The owner has been coming before the Planning Board every 7 years or so for the past thirty years. They have decided that the market is not right; it might never be right and so they are willing to sell the property. It is above Easthampton's drinking water supply. It is a gap between the Ridge Conservation area and the West Farms Conservation area. It has an abundance of wildlife and there is a great opportunity for multi-use trails on the land. The City is only interested in retaining part of the land for conservation purposes; there is the possibility for four cut-outs of land to be used as building lots.

Councilor LaBarge did not agree to the proposed subdivision as the septic system was intended to serve twenty four homes. The wildlife would have been affected. The road cutout was considered dangerous, especially for buses traveling in that area. Many residents objected to the proposal.

Councilor O'Donnell asked why the sellers would not want to carve out the four building lots as proposed by Director Feiden. Director Feiden explained that the seller wants the agreed upon selling price and for the City to package the deal. They are not interested in being in the land development business. The City is having discussions with Habitat for Humanity to help foster a land deal, but the City would never take title to the land. The seller doesn't care as long as there is a simultaneous closing. If buyers are not available at this time, the goal will be to sell the developable land in the future. The process will be a little more complicated, but it is possible. This would require Director Feiden to come back before City Council to approve a different order.

Councilor Murphy indicated that he would not be in favor of taking developable land off of the tax rolls.

Councilor Adams asked if there was any tracking of land that comes off of the City's tax rolls. Every year there is a discussion about new growth, but what isn't considered is the taxable land that is being lost. Director Feiden explained that all the land combined doesn't amount to a huge taxable amount of land, with the possible exception of Look Park. Councilor Adams is also interested in understanding the value of other properties as well, including the James House, etc.

G. 16.069 Order To Authorize The Purchase Of 110 +/- Acres To Add To The Brookwood Marsh Conservation Area

Councilor Adams moved to return the order back to the full City Council with a positive recommendation; Councilor LaBarge seconded the motion. The motion failed on a voice vote of 2 Yes, 2 No (Councilors Murphy & Adams).

Director Feiden stated that the City does not intend to use the borrowing authority. The seller is also a developer and will be keeping six lots within the area (not shown on map): two lots on Stone Ridge Drive and four lots on Burts Pit Road. It is the City's intention to carve off two lots on Overlook Drive; however, the goal will be to place the lot frontage on existing roads and not to create any new roadways.

Councilor LaBarge indicated that the former land owner has passed away. There were several meetings with Mr. Doug Kohl; there was an outcry about the amount of houses that were proposed to go up on Overlook Drive. Director Feiden indicated that the owner never came forward to the Planning Board with subdivision plans.

Councilor Murphy indicated that he is familiar with this land. He believes that Mr. Kohl, if he were alive, would be interested in developing this piece of land. The land is developable and there is water and sewer already in place. The Housing Partnership Committee are looking for places to put housing. There are portions of this land from Stone Ridge to behind Florence Road that is not developable because it is a marsh. However, Councilor Murphy feels that some of the land is developable. He does not agree to take the entire tract of land, but perhaps parts of it.

Director Feiden noted that the entire area from Overlook Drive to the northerly end of Stone Ridge Drive is of special concern because of the National Heritage Program because of rare species. Also there is a vernal pool near Stone Ridge Drive. The developable area is between Overlook Drive and Burts Pit Road.

H. 16.071 Financial Order To appropriate \$32,356.31 From The GF Free Cash To NPS For Federal eRate To Support Technology Infrastructure

Councilor LaBarge moved to return the order back to the full City Council with a positive recommendation; Councilor Carney seconded the motion. The motion was approved on a voice vote of 4 Yes, 0 No.

Mayor Narkewicz indicated that this is a pass-through to the school department for a federal reimbursement. The School Department is not allowed to receive the reimbursement directly. The eRate

program is through the FCC and is intended to reimburse educational institutions for technology purchases that allow for internet access.

I. 16.072 Financial Order To Rescind Borrowing Authority For Land Off Of Easthampton Road (Previously Approved In August, 2015)

Councilor Carney moved to return the order back to the full City Council with a positive recommendation; Councilor LaBarge seconded the motion. The motion was approved on a voice vote of 3 Yes, 0 No, 1 Absent (Councilor Adams).

J. 16.076 To Appropriate \$9,850 From The GF Free Cash For Technical Assistance To Analyze Broadband Services

Councilor LaBarge moved to return the order back to the full City Council with a positive recommendation; Councilor Carney seconded the motion. The motion was approved on a voice vote of 4 Yes, 0 No.

This is an order for a feasibility analysis to bring the fiber optics network to the community which will allow the City to become a broadband provider. The City has recently joined Next Century Cities, a group of cities that have been exploring the potential of providing broadband to the community. Part of the objectives is to provide better, cheaper access to broadband. The order before Council tonight will allow the IT Director to bring in an expert in the field of broadband systems to analyze the existing infrastructure and determine the potential for expansion beyond the current capabilities and to identify the opportunities for the City.

One of the big projects that the City undertook with Comcast over the last ten years was to connect 25 municipal buildings (city buildings, schools and libraries) via a fiber optics network. In addition to that, because the City is part of the five-college network, the City has access to four strands of fiber as well as a connection to One Federal Street in Springfield (one of the State's three data centers).

Councilor Dwight supports the order and the idea of providing internet service as a public utility. There are families that don't have access to internet capability because they can't afford the rates posed by internet providers. There are several models out there, however the developing technology may suggest a different model for Northampton and the plan should be one that supports the needs of our City going forward.

Councilor Klein supports the idea of a municipal broadband utility. She would like a better understanding of what will be expected of a consultant. Mayor Narkewicz indicated that most other communities that have explored municipal broadband service for their community have expressed that creating a utility company is a fairly specialized field. There are various models that could be pursued; the City is currently lacking in the expertise to explore the options available.

Councilor Bidwell supports bringing in outside expertise as needed to support opportunities to enhance economic development in the downtown area.

5. New Business

6. Adjourn: At 8:30 p.m. Councilor LaBarge moved to adjourn the meeting; Councilor Carney seconded the motion. The motion was approved on a voice vote of 4 Yes, 0 No.

Prepared by:

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